

REVIEW

by prof. Velislava Atanasova Chavdarova, PhD

University of Veliko Tarnovo "St. Cyril and St. Methodius"

Faculty of Philosophy, department of Psychology

For awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

in the scientific area 3.2. Psychology

Doctoral programme *Social psychology*

Author: Teodora Silvestrova Medneva

Thesis theme: "Burnout syndrome in freelancers: factors, diagnosis and prevention of professional distress"

PhD supervisor: Yury Yanakiev – Plovdiv university "Paisii Hilendarski"

1. General description of the presented materials

By order No. P 21-2309 dated 4.12.2023 of the Rector of the Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury to ensure a procedure for the defense of a dissertation work on the topic "Burnout syndrome in persons freelance: factors, diagnosis and prevention of professional distress" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.2. Psychology, doctoral program "Social Psychology ". The author of the dissertation is Teodora Medneva - PhD student in independent training at the Department of "Psychology" with scientific supervisor Associate Professor Yuriy Yanakiev from the "Paisiy Hilendarski" University of Applied Sciences.

The set of materials on paper presented by Teodora Medneva is in accordance with Article 36 (1) of the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of the PU, includes the following documents:

- a request to the Rector of the PU to disclose the procedure for the defense of a dissertation work;
- curriculum vitae in European format;

- protocol from the departmental council related to reporting the readiness to open the procedure and preliminary discussion of the dissertation work;
- dissertation work;
- abstract;
- a list of scientific publications on the subject of the dissertation;
- copies of scientific publications;
- list of noticed citations;
- declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;

The doctoral student has attached 4 publications - 3 independent and 1 co-authored.

2. Brief biographical data for the doctoral student

The professional and creative path of Teodora Medneva shows diversity, versatility, purposefulness and precision of scientific interests and a desire to reconcile scientific development in the field of psychology with expert administrative activity. The doctoral student demonstrates organizational and intellectual capacity, deserving of positive evaluation. These conclusions are a consequence of her career development.

The author has a master's degree in management psychology and a specialist in human resource management. Holds administrative positions in PU "Paisiy Hilendarski". Her professional experience is more than 20 years. In her training and work path, there is both consistency, persistence and a desire for upgrading and development.

The procedure for acquisition of ONS "Doctor" was carried out correctly, in compliance with all legal requirements.

3. Actuality of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and tasks

The topicality of the topic is indisputable, since the modernization of modern society is to a significant extent related to a change in the ways of working and the dominant models of work behavior, increasingly leading to professional burnout. In modern conditions, when the socialization of the individual and the achievement of a certain position depend on his integration in the labor market, the identification of the main risks of the occurrence of burnout syndrome and the definition of the determinants that give rise to it and the consequences of its occurrence are immanently associated with emotional differences - disorders that hinder professional and social functioning. The parallel inclusion for the first

time in the scientific practice of personal dispositions and the professional challenges of freelancing as a way of working, described and studied from a theoretical and practical point of view, determine the significance of the peer-reviewed dissertation work. The doctoral student does not stop at identifying the problems, but offers conceptualization and recommendations for sustainability and coping with preventive and practical potential.

The challenges of freelancing associated with starting and running a business are convincingly described such as planning the work day, negotiating with clients, enforcing self-discipline and achieving productivity, building a solid online presence, creating a steady stream of projects, dealing emotionally with loss of customers, etc. Complex engagement with these activities leads to the increase of risks among freelancers. They are a prerequisite for workplace distress, which has been identified by the WHO as one of the main problems in the lives of working people. At the same time, authors studying occupations often emphasize the influence of external factors, while the personal factor continues to be neglected by specialists dealing with human resources. In the present work, there is a personal approach with an emphasis on the operationalization of the concepts of "professional distress", "burnout", as well as the psychophysiological aspects of distress and the resistance to burnout, depending on a number of psychosocial factors.

The research is innovative and creative, with an undoubted practical orientation, positioned in the field of social and organizational psychology.

4. Knowing the problem

The main focus of the dissertation is professional distress and burnout in individuals engaged in professional activity as a freelancer. The PhD student demonstrates excellent knowledge of the issues under consideration, presenting a thorough overview and critical analysis on the one hand of the specifics of this activity, and on the other of classic and modern studies of distress, burnout and the personal dispositions that determine them. A theoretical analysis of leading psychological concepts and models explaining the phenomena was made. The text is distinguished by its analyticity and in-depth knowledge of the theoretical base and the most current research on the problems on a global scale.

5. Research methodology

The doctoral student has invested her research efforts in the broad discussion field of modern psychology, focused in the specifics of some of the most current topics related to

social and organizational psychology. The purpose of the theoretical-applied research is to empirically analyze the correlation between personal and work environment factors in freelancers and the manifestation of burnout, as well as their complex impact on their psychological, social and health status.

A specification and summary of the specifics of the burnout syndrome in freelancers from the point of view of demographic characteristics is sought; professional characteristics; characteristics related to the labor activity of the respondents; relationship between emotional burnout, dehumanization, and feelings of failure and job dissatisfaction.

In accordance with the correctly formulated hypotheses, the influence of personal, demographic, communicative, professional and family factors on the occurrence, course and consequences of burnout in individuals engaged in freelancing is sought.

The scientific research toolkit was also chosen correctly, which includes a questionnaire for the study of burnout and an author's questionnaire seeking answers to demographic characteristics and specifics of the work environment.

The chosen research methodology allows achieving the set goal and obtaining an adequate answer to the tasks formulated in the dissertation work.

The empirical study was carried out in four phases in the period 2020-2022 and involved a respectable number of 1183 persons aged between 20 and 56, which gives the study an undoubted representativeness.

Statistical and mathematical methods such as descriptive statistics, calculation of mean values, one-factor dispersion analysis, correlation, regression, mediator and moderator analysis were used in the processing of the obtained data. The collected empirical data were analyzed using the computer program SPSS (version-21).

6. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation work

The dissertation has a volume of 225 pages. Contains 50 tables and 55 figures. The literature used includes 292 sources in Bulgarian and English. It consists of an introduction, three chapters, conclusion, limitations of the study, contributions, bibliography and two appendices.

Given the specificity of the current dissertation study, the structure is standard. The first chapter ("Theoretical background") is divided into six points, which sequentially present the key constructs for the topic.

The first paragraph reveals the nature of the gig economy as a factor in the intensive increase in freelancing. The second point in the first chapter introduces the essence of freelancing, as well as the relationship between concepts such as self-insurance and self-employment. Basic concepts of the constructs are presented, the main theoretical research perspectives are defined. The peculiarities of the perception of environmental factors by the individual, his reactions, as well as the possible consequences of the influence of this condition on his health were analyzed in depth.

In the fourth and fifth subparagraphs, the construct burnout is defined. The realized analysis of the concept is distinguished by expertise and thoroughness, especially in determining the stages and the main symptoms and manifestations of emotional burning.

The holistic approach proposed by the doctoral student connects the psychophysiological aspects of distress with resilience as a personal disposition and the psychosocial factors that determine it.

Chapter two presents the design of the empirical study. The components traditionally contained in it are correctly formulated, the tools used and the contingent of examined persons are described, as well as the stages of the conducted research.

The third chapter contains a detailed quantitative (based on statistical methods) and qualitative (content) analysis of the results of the empirical research. Especially valuable for practitioners are the described approaches to prevention and therapy. An integrated diagnostic tool for the assessment of professional burnout is presented, and the limitations of the study are correctly defined.

In the analysis and interpretation of the obtained data, the doctoral student unfolds her research potential, demonstrating competence and professionalism, deserving of an undoubted positive evaluation. The generalizations made are relevant to the obtained results and have practical applicability.

The list of used literature includes 292 sources in Bulgarian, English and Spanish. The dissertation contains 50 tables and 55 figures.

7. Contributions and significance of the development for science and practice

In a theoretical aspect, the following scientific contributions can be found:

- By using an integral research approach, the information on distress and burnout among freelancers was studied and systematized by taking into account the personal and professional specifics;
- A comprehensive concept has been developed regarding the stages and problems faced by professionals dealing with professional burnout among freelancers;
- Resistance to stress and burnout has been operationalized as a basic personal disposition, studied and commented on interdisciplinary and expertly;
- The findings and analytical observations are the basis for formulating conclusions and presenting an author's model for the study of resilience and description of coping strategies for individuals engaged in free professions;
- The predictors that complexly influence and determine the occurrence, progress and coping with burnout have been studied.

In applied aspect, the following scientific contributions can be found:

- The research model is comprehensively described. The subject, object, purpose, hypotheses and tasks are precisely formulated. Adequately structured author's methodology for the study of the measured values is applied;
- The verification of the established hypotheses and sub-hypotheses was carried out by means of appropriate tools and statistical processing of the data. The qualitative comparative analysis of the results was carried out correctly;
- Formulated conclusions are relevant to the specific study, and the summary has realistic applicability;
- The formulated recommendations successfully verify both the results of the conducted theoretical-applied research and the rich professional experience of the dissertation student.

I cannot but express the opinion that the doctoral student has successfully achieved the goals of the dissertation work, has shown excellent knowledge of the issue, personal and professional commitment to it, as well as formed skills for scientific research work. I believe that it will be continued with the realization of the future ideas that arose during the writing of this dissertation work.

8. Evaluation of publications on the dissertation work

The presented list of 4 publications on the topic of the dissertation, independently and in co-authorship, corresponds to the requirements for obtaining the ONS "doctor". Their publication in prestigious magazines is a guarantee of professionalism. Their thoroughness and quality are unquestionable.

9. Personal participation of the doctoral student

The participation of the doctoral student in the planning, implementation, analysis, summary and interpretation of the results obtained from the theoretical-applied research is indisputable. Professionalism and precision were demonstrated in the individual stages. The formulated contributions correspond to the achieved results.

10. Abstract

The abstract synthesizes and accurately reflects the content of the dissertation work. It was developed according to the requirements of the Regulations for the acquisition of scientific degrees at the University of Plovdiv and reflects the main results achieved in the dissertation.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

In order to popularize the dissertation work, I would recommend its publication as a monographic work.

12. Personal impressions

The presented work shows the excellent theoretical and practical preparation of the doctoral student on the researched problems, as well as her ability to process, interpret, analyze and summarize the results of psychological research. The development is balanced and well structured.

The conclusions and findings are both adequate and bold. I believe that the author has the necessary skills and competences to continue her scientific development.

13. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results

Future research may also include a comparative study of the determining factors and the specificity of burnout in other professional groups and in a European perspective.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific, scientific-applied and applied results, which represent an original contribution to science and meets all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of ZRASRB and the Regulations of PU "Paisiy Hilendarski" .

Development shows that the doctoral student Teodora Medneva possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in scientific specialty 3.2. Psychology, demonstrating qualities and skills for independent conducting of scientific research.

Due to the above, I confidently give my positive assessment of the conducted theoretical and applied research, presented in the above-reviewed dissertation work, abstract, achieved results and contributions, and I propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to **Teodora Medneva** in field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.2. Psychology, doctoral program "Social Psychology".

5.01. 2024

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Prof. Phd. Velislava Chavdarova